Legitimizing A Low-Born, Regicide Monarch: The Case Of The Mamluk Sultan Baybars And The Ilkhans In The Thirteenth Century

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Chapter X

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Between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, Syria-Palestine[1] and Egypt were the scene of a number of political upheavals, most memorably the arrival of the Crusaders who seized Jerusalem, the second-holiest city of Islam, in 1099. That event traumatized the Muslim community. In 1187 Saladin, the famous Ayyubid ruler, who became a paragon of chivalry in the West,[2] recaptured Jerusalem from the Crusaders and, in Muslim eyes, restored the honour of Islam. The Ayyubid dynasty started a long tradition of enlisting into its armies great numbers of Turkish military slaves, the Mamluks (*mamlūk*),[3] from Dasht-i Qipčaq. These Turks were nomads of the steppes north of the Black Sea.[4] The Ayyubids had ample opportunity to acquire them as slaves, as children were sold at a very low price (Amitai 2006: 55). The Mamluks, also known as Baḥriyya,[5] were then enlisted into the personal guards (*ḥalqa*) of the Ayyubid rulers. After Saladin's death in 1193, his states were divided among his brother and his sons. Dissension within the Ayyubid family weakened their power and contributed to the emergence of the Mamluk sultanate and the rise to power of the future Sultan Baybars, 'Lord Tiger.'[6] The aim of this article is to trace Baybars' extraordinary fate. Acquired by a slave merchant on the Qipčaq steppes, he was first purchased as a slave soldier by the amir Rukn al-Dīn al-Bunduqdārī, then bought from him by the Ayyubid sultan al-Malik al-Ṣālīḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb (r. 1240-1249), who made him a member of his personal guard. Baybars eventually gained the sultanate himself in 1260. This remarkable feat made a great impact, and Baybars subsequently became a hero of Arabic popular literature.[7]

Introduction: Baybars' Path To Power

The Baḥriyya Mamluks supplanted the Ayyubids in Egypt and in Syria-Palestine thanks to two major military crises in which Baybars played a leading role. His first deed of arms took place during the Egyptian crusade of Louis XI, later to become St. Louis, in 1249-1250. Baybars commanded the Ayyubid army alongside his master on the battlefield of Manṣūra in Egypt in 1250, where the Muslim troops

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• In this paper, I use the transliteration in general usage for Arabic in English.

[1] In the medieval sources, this region is referred to as Bilād al-Shām. It was composed of Syria, Palestine, and two regions: Jordan and Mount Lebanon. In the appendix, see a map with geographic names in Syria-Palestine at the time of Baybars.

[2] See Jubb 2000.

[3] The Arabic term *mamlūk* literally means 'something owned,' and thence 'slave,' especially in the sense of a military slave bought by a sultan or amir in order to form an army. This practice had been introduced on a much smaller scale by the Abbasid caliphs. The military slaves were generally of Central Asian origin. For a general overview of Mamluks in Islam, see Amitai 2006: 40-78.

[4] In the West, the Qipčaq Turks were known as Cumans. See Hazai 1986: 125-6.

[5] The *baḥriyya* Mamluks were trained in barracks located on an island in the Nile (*al-baḥr*), hence their name.

[6] On the Ayyubids, see Cahen 1991: 820-30.

[7] On the 'Baybars's Roman (*sīrat Baybars*)' in the Arabic popular literature, see Paret 1960: 1160-1; and Garcin 2003, which as well as studies includes an ample bibliography and references to the editions and translation of the original texts. The 'Romance of Baybars' is recited to this day in certain *cafés* in the old city of Damascus, where his tomb is located.

were victorious although the Ayyubid sultan died 'a martyr.'[8] The dead sultan's son, al-Malik al-Mu'aẓẓam Tūrān-Shāh, then ascended the Egyptian throne. But, with the murder of al-Malik al-Mu'aẓẓam Tūrān-Shāh, his master's legitimate successor, Baybars put an end to the Ayyubid dynasty in Egypt. His secretary and official biographer, Ibn 'Abd al-Ẓāhir, justified the assassination as realizing God's will (*qadar*).[9]

A decade later, Syria-Palestine was in turn attacked, but this time by invaders from the east led by Hülegü, founder of the Mongol Ilkhanid dynasty in Iran. Having conquered Baghdad on 13 February 1258, bringing the 'Abbasid caliphate to an end, Hülegü (d. 8 February 1265) launched his campaign against northern Syria in late 1259. After a long siege of Aleppo, he captured the city on 18 January 1260; immediately afterwards, his general-in-chief Kitbugha took Damascus. The Mongol troops penetrated as far as Palestine, where their advance was halted. Once again, Baybars stood out for his feats of arms at the side of the sultan al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Quṭuz during the victory of the Mamluk troops over the Mongols at 'Ayn Jālūt on 3 September 1260.[10] It must be said, however, that the Mamluk historians attached far too much importance to this victory. Hülegü had been obliged to return to Mongolia following the death of the great khan Möngke in August 1259, leaving Kitbugha in the region to command a military detachment of only a few thousand horsemen. They were crushed without much difficulty by the Mamluk troops, who numbered 120,000.[11] Then, after the victory of 'Ayn Jālūt, the Mamluk sultan al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Quṭuz was in turn assassinated. The affair is reported as follows: 'The sultan [Baybars] went to the hunt with him [Quṭuz] [...] then he struck him with his sword. His death was the accomplishment of God's decree (*qadar*)' (Ibn 'Abd al-Ẓāhir: 68). As we may observe, these two regicides posed a problem for Baybars; his biographer invokes a divine decree to justify both cases.

On becoming sultan, Baybars took the regnal name al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Rukn al-Dīn Baybars Ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Ṣāliḥī al-Bunduqdārī (r. 1260-1277). Two important elements of this name demand attention. The first is 'Ibn 'Abd Allāh (son of God's slave),' which constitutes a fictive lineage intended to make up for the lack of ancestry resulting from his servile origins and lack of any known family.[12] The second element is the 'relative adjective (*nisba*)'[13] al-Ṣāliḥī, derived from the name of his former master, al-Malik al-Ṣālīḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb, which he claimed in an attempt to wipe out the memory of the murder of the master's son and successor, al-Malik al-Mu'aẓẓam Tūrān-Shāh. He was thus able to locate his own reign within the continuity of the Ayyubid dynasty he had ended in Egypt.

In fact, this memorable victory marked the beginning of a new chapter in Baybars' political career. But just as he was acquiring prominence on the political stage, a new ideology had appeared within the Islamic Orient world, whose demands he could not meet as a mere Mamluk. The successors of Chinggis Khan, in their diplomatic correspondence with the Latin West and the Mamluk sultans, asserted the claims of the 'imperial good fortune' or 'charismatic fortune (*suu*)' that the 'Eternal Heaven (*möngke tenggeri*)' had granted to the Khans of Chinggis' line.[14] All nations of the earth were

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[8] See a few details on this battle in Wiet 1991: 1158-60.

[9] Ibn 'Abd al-Ẓāhir: 50. Fragments of a translation of this biography are to be found in Sublet 1992: 24-54. On the term *qadar*, very important in Islamic theology, see Gardet 1978: 280-3.

[10] On this battle, see Amitai 1992: 119-50.

[11] The sources give varying estimates of the forces present, but agree that the Mongol fighters were outnumbered. See Amitai 1992: 123-9.

[12] On these fictitious lineages, see Sublet 1991: 30.

[13] The *nisba*, or 'relative adjective,' is one of the elements that make up medieval Arabic personal names. Its function is to express an individual's relationship with a person, group, or place, see Sublet 1995: 55-7.

[14] According to Rachewiltz (1973: 21-36), this concept was known to the Chinese, with whom the Mongols had long been in contact. Golden (1981: 37-76), however, considers that the parallels with the Turks are more relevant. On

invited to 'be in peace (*el*) and harmony with the Mongols,' or in other words to accept a state of total and unconditional submission (Amitai-Preiss 1999: 62). A sovereign who refused to submit was considered a rebel (*bulgha)* against not only the Mongol Khans but also against the 'Eternal Heaven.' In 1269 Abagha (r. 1265-1282), Hülegü's successor and the great-grandson of Chinggis Khan, sent a messenger to say to Baybars: 'The best thing you can do is to make peace with us [...]. You are a slave bought at Sīwās; how can you set yourself up against the kings of the earth?' (Amitai-Preiss 1995: 121; Broadbridge 2001: 107). Abagha, a ruler of imperial blood with the mandate of the 'Eternal Heaven,' could not but express his scorn for a rebel of no ancestry. Baybars, having been bought as a slave, could not counter this Mongol claim of lineage (*nasab*)[15] in kind. Moreover, he had come to power after committing regicide twice over.

How to wipe clean these blemishes?

Baybars presented himself as protector of the true faith against the crusades and the Mongol dynasty of Iran, denounced in Syria-Palestine as pagan and tyrannical. Like all the Mamluks, however, he had little acquaintance with Islamic culture, and was advised on these matters by a shaykh who appears as his 'spiritual director,' one al-Khaḍir (the Green). All the biographers of the shaykh in question attest that he barely ever left the sultan's side and held great sway over him. The sultan made him privy to his most secret plans, never excluded him from his councils, and took him along with him on all his military expeditions (Pouzet 1978: 176).[16] Baybars' 'spiritual director' was, however, a controversial figure among his contemporaries. In April-May 1271, returning from his victory over the Crusaders at Crac des Chevaliers, Baybars, upon the urging of the shaykh, ordered the pillaging of the great synagogue of Damascus and had the Torah and all the furnishings burned (Pouzet 1978: 178; *idem* 1986: 335). The chroniclers attest that he also persecuted the Christians, ordering the pillaging of several churches (Pouzet **1978**: 178). It may be that he was the instigator of certain acts of violence that Baybars carried out against Christian communities and Muslim sects that were considered heretical. The Mamluk sultan thus constructed his political legitimacy on an Islamic basis. That legitimacy is echoed in the narrative historical sources, particularly his royal biographies, in his monumental epigraphy, and in the apocalyptic literature.

I have chosen to analyse three important elements in this study of Baybars' construction of an Islamic legitimacy: the restoration of the Abbasid caliphate in Cairo, the use of the Qur'anic symbolism attaching to certain sites in Syria-Palestine, and, finally, presentation of Sultan Baybars as the 'eschatological last emperor.'

The Restoration Of The Caliphate In Cairo

Baybars' first gesture, shortly after he came to power, was to restore the caliphate in Cairo, receiving a member of the Abbasid family who had escaped from the Baghdad massacre. The survivor's family tree was confirmed by the chief *qāḍī* of Cairo, and in June 1261 he was invested as caliph with the regnal name of al-Mustanṣir bi-llāh. Baybars then sent him to reconquer Baghdad at the head of a small army. The sultan was in fact afraid that the new caliph might succeed in seizing the former Abbasid capital, and thereby take from Baybars the prestige he hoped to have for himself due to his restoration of the

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this ideology in diplomatic correspondences, see Voegelin 1940-1941: 378-413; Richard 1973: 212-22; Amitai-Preiss 1994: 11-13; *idem* 1999: 57-92; Aigle 2004: 982-5; Aigle 2005: 143-62.

[15] In Arabic, *nasab* means 'lineage, ancestry, genealogy'. See Rosenthal 1993: 967-9.

[16] I am grateful to Anne-Marie Eddé for directing my attention to this reference. The name of this shaykh was: al-Khaḍir b. Abī Bakr al-Mihrānī (d. 11 June 1277).

caliphate in Cairo.[17] His fear was unfounded. In November 1261, the Ilkhanid armies easily crushed the Muslim detachment in the environs of Baghdad (Amitai 1995: 58).

The caliphate very soon came to be used as an instrument in Baybars' hands. Berke Khan, the Mongol sovereign of the Golden Horde who had converted to Islam,[18] sent a delegation of Mongols to the sultan (Ibn 'Abd al-Ẓāhir: 142), which arrived in Cairo on 9 November 1262. The matter under discussion was an alliance of Baybars and Berke Khan against their mutual enemy, the Ilkhans. Baybars took the opportunity to enthrone a new caliph, with the name al-Ḥākim bi-amr Allāh (r. 1261-1302), a week later, in the presence of the Mongol envoys. As with the previous caliph, scholars in the religious sciences confirmed the lineage of the new pretender. This new caliph charged Baybars with the responsibility of protecting the Muslim territories, invited him to make the pilgrimage and named him his 'associate in supporting the true religion (*qasīm fī qiyyām bi-l-ḥaqq*)' (Ibn 'Abd al-Ẓāhir: 142). He then delivered two sermons dwelling on the themes of the leadership of the community – *imāma*[19] – and holy war – *jihād* (Ibn 'Abd al-Ẓāhir: 143).[20] Immediately thereafter, the caliph was stripped of all power and shut up in the Cairo citadel.

Baybars now sent a letter to Berke Khan with the Mongol delegation, accompanied by a copy of the caliph's genealogical tree. Symbolically appropriating for himself the caliph's illustrious Abbasid lineage, Baybars thus exhibited to the Mongol Khan of the Golden Horde, a sovereign of imperial blood, the ancestry that he personally lacked. Furthermore, the Mamluk sultan thus made himself appear in his dealings with Berke Khan as the genuine leader of the Muslim community, the *umma*. He had enthroned the caliph only to give Islamic legitimacy to his own power. The immediate and tangible result of the restoration of the caliphate in Cairo was to permit Baybars to exercise suzerainty, albeit one that was more symbolic than real, over the holy cities of Islam. He had Berke Khan's name pronounced after his own in Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem.[21] Thus, while making evident his esteem for the Mongol Khan of the Golden Horde, Baybars showed that his authority extended to the holy cities of Islam, thus reaffirming his claim to be leader of the Muslim community.

Baybars' inscriptions in the Near East, with the exception of the mosque of Qārā,[22] all publicize the relationship between the caliph and the sultan. Baybars wanted to proclaim to the Muslim community at large that he was the 'refounder' of the caliphate that had been destroyed by the infidel Mongols. The first occurrence of the title 'associate of the caliph (*qasīm amīr al-mu'minīn*)' appears on the citadel of Damascus immediately after the investiture of the first caliph. The title 'reviver of the glorified caliphate (*muḥyī al-khilāfa al-mu'aẓẓama*),' situated on the citadel of Karak should also be read as a reference to Baybars' restoration of the caliphate (*RCÉA* n° 4733). In Egypt, the seat of the sultan's power, the title 'associate of the caliph' appears in all the surviving inscriptions, but these are far fewer than in Syria-Palestine.

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[17] So we can understand from the account of Ibn 'Abd al-Ẓāhir's nephew, Shāfi' 'Alī, the author of another biography of the sultan but one which takes a more neutral approach to his actions. He points out the question of why Baybars, although conscious of the Mongols' power: 'would have sent such a pitiful force'. See Amitai-Preiss 1995: 59.

[18] The conversion to Islam of Berke Khan, the grandson of Chinggis Khan, is presented with an accompanying garland of legends. See Richard 1967: 173-84.

[19] On the *imāma*, see Madelung 1990: 1192-8.

[20] On the restoration of the caliphate in Cairo, see Thorau 1987: 131-41; and a more detailed account in Heidemann 1994. See also Amitai-Preiss 1995: 56-62; Broadbridge 2001: 96; Aigle (in print).

[21] Berke Khan's name was first pronounced at the Friday prayer in Cairo in July 1263, when the envoys of the khan of the Golden Horde were in the Mamluk capital. See Ibn 'Abd al-Ẓāhir: 174.

[22] Qārā was a little town on the road from Ḥimṣ to Damascus, with an entirely Christian population. The inscription is engraved on a former church which Baybars had turned into a mosque.

A title peculiar to Baybars, 'he who ordered the oath of allegiance sworn to two caliphs (*al-āmir bi-bay'at al-khalīfatayn*),' expresses how the sultan positioned his power in relation to the caliph's. The first occurrence of this title is on Baybars' great mosque in Cairo, founded after the capture of Ṣafad and his latest victory over the Crusaders on 20 July 1266 (*RCÉA* n° 4638). The title indicates that the two caliphs were under an obligation to him. Before the fall of the caliphate of Baghdad, sultans were 'the caliphate's approved (*raḍī l-khilāfa*),' a title which only emphasized the close cooperation between the two powers. Baybars, a regicide usurper and former Mamluk of no ancestry, took pride in having ensured the recognition of two caliphs who had what he sorely lacked: a noble lineage. The title gave Baybars, who was Islamicized but had not himself chosen to convert, religious legitimacy in wielding power. It further expresses the supremacy of the sultan's power compared to that of the caliph.

The Use Of Qur'anic Symbolism

The site of 'Ayn Jālūt, testament of Baybars' victory

As soon as he had taken power, Baybars ordered the construction of a monument, the 'Testament of Victory (*Mashhad al-naṣr*),'[23] to commemorate the great deeds of the Mamluks at 'Ayn Jālūt (Ibn 'Abd al-Ẓāhir: 91). Though its importance was exaggerated, the victory had caused great stir in Syria-Palestine. Proceeding a step further, Baybars turned to his advantage the religious symbolism associated with the site of 'Ayn Jālūt, which is mentioned by the Arab geographers as a village located between Baysān and Nablūs in Palestine.[24] It was claimed that this was the place where David killed Goliath. In the Qur'an, David and Goliath appear as Ṭālūt and Jālūt. Ibn 'Abd al-Ẓāhir, Baybars' secretary and official biographer, linking the site of 'Ayn Jālūt to the Qur'anic tradition wrote that: 'God gave Baybars victory over the Tatars at this place because it is the holy place where Ṭālūt and Jālūt confronted each other and where the enemies' blood was spilled' (Ibn 'Abd al-Ẓāhir: 91-2).

In the Qur'an, Ṭālūt confronts Jālūt and his infidel people with a small army. At the moment of parting with his troops, Ṭālūt says: 'God will try you with a river; whosoever drinks of it is not of me, and whoso tastes it not, he is of me, saving him who scoops up with hand. But they drank of it, except a few of them' (Qur'an 2: 249). With that small number of men, Ṭālūt gained victory. The Biblical model of this Qur'anic account is the battle Gideon fought to deliver the Israelites from Midian and his people. Gideon had his men go down to the water's edge, and God said to him: 'There are still too many men. Bring them down to the water and I will test them for you there [...] You shall separate everyone who laps the water with his tongue as a dog laps, as well as everyone who kneels to drink. Three hundred men lapped water with their hands to their mouth. All the rest of men knelt down to drink water. With the 300 men who lapped water I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand' (Judges 7: 4-7). Facing an army of men 'as many as the locusts,' Gideon crushed the enemy with only the three hundred men who had overcome the divine test. As a result of his resounding victory, the Midianites disappeared from history.

The site of 'Ayn Jālūt, thus identified with a Biblical-Qur'anic war against the pagans, placed Baybars in a line of leaders aided by God in their struggles against impious peoples. Baybars thus, from the beginning of his reign, presented himself as the heroic saviour who had delivered the Muslims from the danger to Islam that the 'infidel' Mongols represented. As we will see later, this same role of saviour is to be seen in certain inscriptions that he left in Syria-Palestine and in the Islamic apocalyptic literature.

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[23] The term *mashhad* means, inter alia, 'being a witness to.' It can be used for a holy place, the tomb of a prophet or saint, and so forth. See Bosworth 1991: 702.

[24] 'Ayn Jālūt is located north-west of Mount Gilboa, 50km to the north-west of Baysān. On this site, see Lewis 1991: 810-11.

The location of Moses' tomb and its Qur'anic resonance

Baybars' first political acts are troubling: Islamicized, he was raised as a Mamluk, freed, and then turned regicide to gain power. He later sought to erase memory of these things and enhance his image as a pious Muslim through activities in the service of Islam and tokens of his personal piety. In 1269 he went to Mecca for the pilgrimage (*al-ḥājj*), one of the five pillars of Islam, which every Muslim who is physically able must perform once in his lifetime. He then went to Jerusalem, where he decided to found a religious complex on the site of the tomb of Moses.[25] Of the royal biographies of Baybars, only Ibn Shaddād gives an account of this building, in the chapter in which he cites the buildings renovated by the sultan in Noble Jerusalem (*al-Quds al-sharīf*). He writes: 'And he built, over the tomb of Moses (*qabr Mūsā*) which lies near the red hill (*al-kathīb al-aḥmar*)[26] [...], a dome (*qubbat*^{an}) and a mosque (*masjid*^{an}). He provided [the tomb of Moses] with an inalienable pious foundation (*waqf*) to meet the needs of its muezzin and imam, those who lived in its vicinity and those who made pious visits to it' (Ibn Shaddād: 351). It is most surprising that Ibn 'Abd al-Ẓāhir, who never misses an opportunity to eulogize his master's virtues, does not report the sultan's reasons for ordering the construction of this building, which was for him highly symbolic.[27]

The choice was in fact dictated by the place's Qur'anic resonance. It is mentioned in the Qur'an: 'And we gave Moses the Book, that haply would be guided, and We made Mary's son, and his mother, to be a sign, and gave them refuge upon a height, where was a hollow and a spring' (Qur'an 23: 49-50). According to the commentators, the hill in question (*al-rabwa*)[28] is the Red Hill mentioned in the hadith collections. The Prophet reportedly said: 'I passed close by [the tomb of] Moses on the night that God made me travel close to the Red Hill. He was standing up praying in his tomb' (Muslim 4: 1845). Islamic tradition places this hill on the road between Jerusalem and the Jordan. A spot not far from here, which came to be known as *Maqām* Nabī Mūsā, was designated by Baybars as the site of the tomb of Moses.[29] The inscription he placed there, relatively low down, is highly visible to all those who arrive at this place on pilgrimage (Amitai 2005: 51). It begins with a verse of the Qur'an: 'The inhabiting of the Holy Mosque as the same as one who believes in God and the Last Day' (Qur'an 9: 18). The inscription then makes a direct reference to Baybars' pilgrimage: 'The establishment of this tomb (*maqām*)[30] was ordered by our Master [...] on his return from the pilgrimage (*al-ḥājj*) when he went to visit Noble Jerusalem' (*RCÉA* n° 4612). In this, Baybars was informing subjects on a pious visit (*al-ziyāra*) to the tomb of Moses that he had accomplished the pilgrimage to the two holy cities of Islam. It was also important for him to locate the tomb of Moses near Jerusalem,[31] in a region where there lay numerous Christian monasteries.[32] Here we see an effort to impose a new religious topography upon and Islamicize a region that still retained a marked Christian presence.

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[25] According to Amitai (2005: 49), Baybars probably took this decision when passing by the site on his way to Jerusalem. It may be that the instigator of the initiative was Shaykh al-Khaḍir. I do not consider it likely that Baybars had the religious knowledge needed to appreciate the site's Qur'anic connection.

[26] Literally, *kathīb* means 'sandhill.'

[27] Amitai 2005: 49. See other's bibliographic elements on *Maqām* Nabī Mūsā in Meri 2002: 259, note 44.

[28] On *rabwa*, see al-Harawī: 25-6. Certain commentators on the Qur'an place this hill near Ramla.

[29] Al-Harawī (45) places Moses' tomb near the village of Jericho. Amitai (2005:45) states that his tomb lies 1.5km south of the Jerusalem-Jericho road and 8km south-west of Jericho. On the inscriptions carved on this tomb, see Mayer 1932: 27-32; Amitai 2005: 45-53.

[30] The term *maqām*, used for the tomb (*qabr*) of a saint or a prophet, literally means 'place'. Numerous equivalents for this term can be found, varying according to place and period. See Mayeur-Jaouen 2000: 150-1.

[31] On Jerusalem's sacrality in early Islam, see Sadan 1993: 231-45.

[32] It seems, judging from the *waqf* document of *al-Nabī Mūsā*, that most of the properties turned into pious foundations had been taken from the Latin churches and the monasteries. See Frenkel 2001: 161.

Baybars, The 'New Alexander' And 'Eschatological Last Emperor'

In three inscriptions, Baybars is styled the 'Alexander of the age (*Iskandar al-zamān*)' (*RCÉA* nos. 4554, 4557 and 4612). This title was used by a number of conquerors in Greek and Roman Antiquity. They sought, by adopting it, to place themselves in the lineage of the Macedonian sovereign and lay claim to the heritage of a charismatic and universal monarchy.[33] In the Muslim world, identification with Alexander appears in the form 'Alexander of the age (*Iskandar al-zamān*)' or 'Second Alexander (*Iskandar al-thānī*).' These appellations were used by, among others, the rulers of Kh^{w}ārazm, the Khwarazmshahs, and the Saljuq Turkish sultans. They are, however, relatively rare before the thirteenth century, coming into common use only under the Mongols of Persia (Polignac 2000: 76). Alexander, although conqueror of the first great Persian empire, that of the Achaemenids, figures in Persian historiography as a Persian ruler. He later served as a model for integrating conquerors from the steppes into Persian history.[34]

Baybars was the first Mamluk ruler to adopt this title. He did so exclusively in Syria-Palestine, and confined its use to the inscriptions carved on three religious monuments there: at Qārā, on the church that he had turned into a mosque in September 1266, after putting the town's Christian population to the sword; on the mausoleum of Khālid b. al-Walīd[35] in Ḥimṣ, also in September 1266; and finally on the tomb of Moses, the building of which he ordered, as we have seen, in 1269 on his return from the pilgrimage to Mecca. Baybars attached great symbolic importance to these religious foundations. The inscriptions were carved following large-scale military operations carried out between 1266 and 1267-8,[36] when the influence of his 'spiritual director,' Shaykh al-Khaḍir, was at its height, a point which merits some comment.

In Islam, the exegetes identify Alexander with 'the man with two horns' or the 'Two-horned One' of the Qur'an, the 'Dhū l-qarnayn' of Sura 18. 83-97. The episode that recounts the exploits of the 'man with two horns' is preceded in the same Sura (18. 59-81) by the story of the journey of Moses and his servant (*fatā*) in search of the 'meeting of the two seas (*majma'a l-baḥrayn*)' (Qur'an **18.** 60). Most of the commentators on Islam's holy book refer to Moses' companion by the name al-Khaḍir (the Green), and associate the journey of Moses and his companion with Alexander's journey in search of the source of life.[37] Making Baybars a 'New Alexander' therefore implied making his faithful 'spiritual director,' who was also called 'the Green,' a 'New al-Khaḍir.' It is entirely possible that the latter was the inspiration for these inscriptions that glorified him as much as they did Baybars.

The Qur'anic man with two horns is considered by the exegetes to have been a believer (*muslim*). He foretold God's punishments upon the wicked and His rewards for the good. He went from one end of the earth, where the sun sets, to the other where it rises, and then reached a place situated between 'two barriers (*bayna l-saddatayn*)'[38] (Qur'an 18. 93). There he found a people that understood no language, in other words a savage people, known as Yājūj and Mājūj. God charged him with the mission of building between these two tall mountains a gigantic wall, made of steel and iron, to prevent

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[33] The bibliography on Alexander is very plentiful. See Bridges and Bürgel 1996; Harf-Lancner, Kappler and Suard 1999; Aigle 2000a; and the numerous researches of F. de Polignac.

[34] In Persia, on the integration of Alexander in the *Shāh-nāma* (Book of the kings), and subsequently uses, see Mélikian-Chirvani 1997: 135-77; *idem* 1998: 7-47.

[35] The latter is considered by Islamic tradition to have been one of the conquerors of Syria-Palestine. For Baybars, restoring his mausoleum allowed him to present himself as part of a 'line' – the line of valorous men who had brought glory to Islam in its early years in the region.

[36] On Baybars' campaigns in Syria-Palestine, see Thorau 1987: 187-258.

[37] On al-Khaḍir in the Qur'an and exegetic traditions, see Wensik 1978: 935-7.

[38] In others words between 'two mountains.'

these savage peoples from 'doing corruption in the earth' (Qur'an 18. 94). Here we have the Qur'anic version of Gog and Magog, the peoples of Biblical eschatology (Ezekiel 38-9; Revelation 20: 7-10).

In Baybars' inscriptions, the reference to Alexander refers to the Two-horned One of the Qur'an. The eschatological dimension of Yājūj and Mājūj is directly linked to their being shut up behind the barrier that Alexander/the Two-horned One built. The bursting forth of the Mongols had led to eschatological worries in the Muslim empire. The peoples of Yājūj and Mājūj (the Gog and Magog of Biblical tradition) clearly represent the nomads of Inner Asia. The identification of the Turks, and later the Mongols, with Yājūj and Mājūj rests on a historical foundation: the peoples mentioned in Ezekiel, the description of whom appears to be an echo of the Cimmerian's invasion of Anatolia at the end of the eighth century BC. The arrival, on God's order, of these peoples of the Biblical and Qur'anic eschatology could be seen as foretelling the end of time.[39] In this context, Baybars appears as the 'New Alexander' of the Qur'an, having halted the Mongol surge into Syria-Palestine. The Mamluk sultan did not, however, see fit to have this title carved on a fortress or on the citadel of Damascus.[40] He probably wished to reserve the eschatological impact of the figure of Alexander for the three religious monuments he founded after his victories over the enemies of Islam and his completion of the pilgrimage to the two holy cities, Mecca and Jerusalem.

Baybars as the 'last emperor' in the apocalyptic literature

Baybars' eschatological role as 'Alexander of the age,' taken up by him in his inscriptions, is also to be found in the Islamic apocalyptic literature. 'Alā' al-Dīn Ibn al-Nafīs (1210-1288), an Egyptian scholar who was probably the sultan's physician, was the author of a treatise entitled *al-Kāmil's Epistle on the Life of the Prophet*,[41] in which a hero who prophecies the calamities that the Islamic community will have to endure for its sins is a certain al-Kāmil. This text includes historical information on Baybars' reign and his character and physical features (Ibn al-Nafīs: 41-8). Ibn al-Nafīs' treatise, describing historical events in a tragic mode, was undoubtedly influenced by the Christian apocalyptic literature, as we see in his description of the deterioration of religious life, the threats of destruction from outside and the eschatological events that are to precede the end of time. Also appearing prominently is the theme of the 'last emperor,' the victorious sovereign who must save the religious community. It is well known that many of the elements found in the historical Christian apocalypses – which circulated, not only as written *corpus*, but also orally through the motifs used in sermons – were incorporated into the Islamic *corpus* (Abel 1954: 37).[42] The concept of the 'last emperor' was widespread in Coptic circles, that is, among Christians in Egypt.

The origin of the eschatological last emperor is to be found in the Apocalypse of the Pseudo-Methodius, a work composed in the seventh century in the context of the Arab invasions of Syria-Palestine.[43] Elements of this text were undoubtedly circulating in Arabic at the time Ibn al-Nafīs composed his treatise, in the second half of the thirteenth century (Kruk 1955: 329). A detailed

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[39] On Gog and Magog and Alexander's barrier, see Anderson 1932; Donzel and Ott 2005: 251-4; Bacqué-Grammont, Polignac and Bohas 2000: 109-27; Aigle 2000b: 62-4.

[40] The title was adopted by al-Malik al-Ashraf Khalīl (r. 1290-1293) in an inscription on the citadel of Alep; see Polignac 2000: 73-87.

[41] The text edited by Meyerhof and Schacht is accompanied by a greatly abridged English translation. See Ibn al-Nafīs' biography: 10-22. *Risālat al-kāmiliyya fī sīrat al-nabawiyya* must have been written before 1274, the date of the oldest preserved manuscript: see Kruk 1995: 324, note 5.

[42] See a survey of Christian apocalyptic literature in Graf 1944, 1: 273-97.

[43] In the Middle Ages, the theme of the last emperor came to be replaced in the religious climate created by the Muslim capture of Edessa in 1144. The subsequent period was marked by the growing importance of the ideal of poverty preached by the Franciscans and by the apocalyptic theories of Joachim of Fiore (ca. 1132-1202). See Reeves 1961: 323-70; Daniel 1968: 671-6; *idem* 1969: 127-54.

examination of Graf's (1944, 1: 173-97) description of the Christian apocalyptic texts of the Islamic period shows that they present many similarities to this treatise of Ibn al-Nafīs.

In these texts, we generally find the theme of the last emperor charged by God with cleansing the religious community of its sins. In his derivative work, Ibn al-Nafīs closely follows this schema, presenting a summary of historical events, then describing the deterioration of religious life. The Prophet of Islam, for example, encouraged marriage for the sake of producing numerous descendants. But Ibn al-Nafīs (34, Arabic text; 61, English translation) observes that at the time when he is composing his text there is a proliferation of sins: homosexuality (*al-liwāṭ*), fornication (*al-zinā'*), etc. Here we find this type of literature being used for ascetic purposes. As in every apocalyptic text, whether Islamic or Christian, he evokes the destruction of the Muslim community by an external threat, in this case the Mongols, although they are not mentioned by name. Ibn al-Nafīs writes: 'The infidels (*al-kuffār*) cannot belong to any religious community (*dhū milla*) because their success would be considered the success of their religion' (Ibn al-Nafīs: 41). They 'live in an inhabited world' very far from the temperate zone. They must come from northern climes (*min al-aṭrāf al-shamāliyya*), because the peoples of those regions are courageous and hard-hearted (Ibn al-Nafīs: 42). Al-Kāmil, the hero of Ibn al-Nafīs' treatise, prophesies that the infidels will not be able to seize all the Muslim lands because, were that to happen, the immediate consequence would be the destruction of Islam. The infidels would occupy only the regions where the aforementioned sins were numerous, in other words Syria-Palestine (Ibn al-Nafīs: 43).

Without naming him, Ibn al-Nafīs presents Baybars as the victorious sovereign, predestined by God to save the Muslim community. As the latter had not respected the instructions of God's messenger (*rasūl Allāh*), divine punishment had appeared in the form of the infidel attacks. The purpose of the text is to exhort the population of Syria-Palestine to accept the power of Sultan Baybars. The religious community, according to Ibn al-Nafīs, can only be saved if two essential conditions are fulfilled: the sultan must have a numerous army (*jaysh kathīr*) and he must be courageous (Ibn al-Nafīs: 45). The victorious sultan must be cruel and merciless (Ibn al-Nafīs: 44). Before combating the infidels (*qabl mujāwzat al-kuffār*), he must seize the property of the country's inhabitants (*amwāl ahl al-bilād*). This is presented by Ibn al-Nafīs as an inescapable necessity for the well-being of the Muslim community which will thus be cleansed of its sins (Ibn al-Nafīs: 44).[44]

The population will then fall into a state of extreme poverty leading to an increase in murder and other crimes in the country (Ibn al-Nafīs: 44). The victorious sultan must then order exemplary punishments (*al-'uqūbāt*): cutting off members (*qaṭa'a al-aṭrāf*), crucifying (*al-ṣalb*), nailing (*al-tasmīr*) (Ibn al-Nafīs: 45). This, Ibn al-Nafīs emphasizes, is why the sultan must, like the infidels, come from the North or 'from a region near to them (*min arḍ taghrīb min-hum*)' (Ibn al-Nafīs: 45). Baybars, being of Turkish origin, was thus harsh enough to carry out this mission of salvation. And he did indeed have character traits similar to those of the Mongols. The treatise thus constructs the sultan's legitimacy in contrast to the ideal sovereign described in his royal biographies and inscriptions, but assigns to him a role whose eschatological import is in line with the meaning of the title 'Alexander of the age' in his monumental epigraphy.

Apocalyptic literature and the eschatological role of the Turks and Mongols

Historically minded Islamic apocalyptic literature was abundant at the time of the Arab invasion of Christian territories in the early years of Islam (Cook 2002: 34-66), and later at the time of the Byzantine

[44] Several years before the capture of Baghdad, the arrival of the Mongols at the gates of Europe in 1241 had also rekindled eschatological expectations. In a letter addressed to the king of England by Emperor Frederick II, preserved in Matthew Paris's *Chronica Majora*, the Mongols are presented as God's instruments, charged with 'purifying' the Christians of their sins. See Matthieu Paris, 4: 112.

reconquest of some territories that had come under Islamic rule (Cook 2002: 66-84). Another cycle of historical apocalypses is linked to the Turkish intrusion into the Muslim world (Cook 2002: 84-91), an intrusion for which the Abbasid caliphs were blamed as they had introduced them into the Muslim empire as slaves (*mamlūk*) in their armies (Cook 2002: 84). In his study of Islamic apocalyptic literature, David Cook does not refer to any such text of the Mamluk period nor to Ibn al-Nafīs' treatise in particular. But the arrival of the Mongols in Islamic territories was often presented in an apocalyptic perspective by Muslim authors. Although the example chosen here does not directly concern Baybars' legitimacy, it would be of interest to compare a textual fragment – taken from the work of a Mamluk author – with the treatise of Ibn al-Nafīs. The two authors, although differing in their approaches, both adopt religious criteria to explain the surge of the infidel Mongols across the Islamic empire.

Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Nuwayrī (d. 1333) was both a historian and an official in the administration of the Mamluk sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (d. 1341). He compiled an encyclopaedia covering the entire range of knowledge that a man of his age was expected to gain.[45] A part of this monumental encyclopaedia, composed between 1314 and 1330, deals with the Mongols. One episode is of particular interest to us here, that concerning the rise to power of Chinggis Khan.[46] Al-Nuwayrī begins his account of the future Great Khan's origins by reporting that he was said to have led the life of an ascetic (*tazahhada*) for a long time and to have withdrawn to the mountains. The reason for [this behaviour] was his conversation with a certain Jew whom he asked why Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad had attained such a lofty position. The Jew replied that they had dedicated themselves to God and that He had granted them that dignity in recompense for their love for Him. Chinggis Khan then asked him, 'If I love God and dedicate myself to Him, will he give me such a position?' The Jew replied, 'Yes, and I can tell you that, in our books, it is written that a dynasty will be descended from you' (al-Nuwayrī, 27: 207).

Chinggis Khan at once gave up his blacksmith's trade, left his people and withdrew to the mountain, where he ate only permitted foods (*al-mubāḥāt*), that is, those permitted by Islam. When people came to visit him, he refused to speak to them, but indicated they should clap their hands and say, 'O God, O God (*yā Allāh*, *yā Allāh*)' (al-Nuwayrī, 27: 207). Chinggis Khan would then start dancing. This amounts to a description of a rite of *dhikr* and a *samā'* (the Sufi practice of repeating the name of God while dancing).[47] Al-Nuwayrī's purpose is to present the future conqueror of the Muslim territories in the guise of an ascetic who aspires to God, despite his un-Islamic heritage (Lyall 2006: 155). In doing so, the Mamluk historian, like Ibn al-Nafīs, puts forward a divine justification for Chinggis Khan's success. God has rewarded Chinggis Khan's love and devotion for him, as he did for the three prophets of monotheism, by granting victories to him and to his descendants. Lyall (2006: 54) considers that al-Nuwayrī projects the image of a fourteenth-century Sufi onto the figure of Chinggis Khan. I am more inclined to think that the Mamluk historian gives a description of the origins of the future Mongol Great Khan in the same perspective as Ibn al-Nafīs, as a scourge of God, without considering him to be the eschatological last emperor. But in presenting Chinggis Khan as a figure who knows of the prophets of the three monotheistic religions, and who, while not belonging to any religion, seeks God and withdraws from the world, he turns him into a 'proto-Muslim' who becomes the instrument of divine

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[45] *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab*: 'On the art of reaching the goal in the different branches of learning,' *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, *Thesaurus. Index* 1980: 105. Arabic titles are in most cases impossible to translate into English and do not provide a good indication of the work's precise content.

[46] Somewhat divergent interpretations of this passage have been the subject of two publications (Amitai 2001: 23-36; Lyall 2006: 153-60). The intent here is not to discuss the arguments of those authors, but to show that al-Nuwayrī's description of the Mongols' arrival in the Islamic world was explained in ways very similar to that of Ibn al-Nafīs.

[47] On *dhikr*, see Gardet 1977: 230-33; on *samā'*, see During 1995: 1052-4.

decree. Al-Nuwayrī thus gives, *a posteriori*, a divine justification for the abolition of the 'Abbasid caliphate and the various Ilkhanid invasions of Syria-Palestine. This short account in fact amounts to an apocalyptic text whose objectives are consistent with those of Ibn al-Nafīs.

Baybars versus Hülegü

Finally, I propose to analyse a Christian apocalyptic text, composed in Karshuni (Syriac written in the Arabic alphabet), which can be read in comparison to Ibn al-Nafīs' text. It is a *Testament of Our Lord Jesus Christ* concerning the Mongol invasions, addressed to the apostle Peter.[48] This particular genre of texts appeared in Syriac in response to challenges that were of both religious and political character. The authors of *Testaments* kept their community's faith alive through the authority of Christ and his apostles in times that were –due to particular historical circumstances – troubled ones for Christian communities.[49]

The historical data in this *Testament* includes the arrival of the Mongols in the Muslim empire, the successors of Hülegü (with a reference to Ghazan Khan's conversion), Baybars' seizure of power, and the description of his successors' reigns. We can judge from this that it cannot have been composed before the early fourteenth century. The content of this apocalypse is quite different from that of Ibn al-Nafīs' text: the author gives a Christian view of the Mongol invasions. This *Testament of Our Lord Jesus Christ to the Apostle Peter* is notable for its strong historic character; indeed, it is that rare creature, a genuine historical apocalypse. It gives the names of people and places, an unusual occurrence in this type of literature whose content is of a symbolic nature and which, to be understood, must be interpreted in the light of Biblical texts. As we have seen, Ibn al-Nafīs does not mention Baybars by name, though the contemporary reader of his text would understand that he is indeed the person foretold by al-Kāmil as the eschatological last emperor. A true counterpart to the 'Epistle' of Ibn al-Nafīs, the *Testament of Our Lord Jesus Christ* takes this one step further: 'Know, Peter, that scourges and terrors will fall upon my people from the sons of Ismā'īl[50] (*banū Ismā'īl*) [...]. Then I warn you, Peter, that in that time there will rise up against them [the Muslims of Syria-Palestine] sultans that will be called al-Ẓawāhir [...].[51] These sons of slaves will sit on golden seats and the sons of free men will stand about their heads, like slaves (*Testament*: 262).' This is a direct reference to the emergence of the Mamluk state, which as we have seen arose from a military caste whose origins lay outside Syria-Palestine. The author of the *Testament* was greatly influenced by memory of the reign of Baybars (whose name, as we shall see below, is explicitly mentioned in the text). He refers to the Mamluk sultans as al-Ẓawāhir, a distortion of al-Malik al-Ẓāhir (the Magnificent Sovereign), Baybars' honorific title (*laqab*).[52] 'From being slaves, they will become sultans who know neither father nor mother,' writes the author of the *Testament*, emphasizing Baybars' want of lineage (*Testament*: 262). We then find the theme of the deterioration of religious life in the Muslim community, which justified the Mamluk seizure of power: 'At that time, sin multiplied, as did fornication (*al-zīnā*) and false witnesses (*al-shahādāt al-zūr*)' (*Testament*: 262). The description of Hülegü's arrival in the Muslim empire is consistent with historical fact: 'I warn you again, Peter, that a powerful and impious king (*malik qawī kāfir*) whose name is Hulawūn will come out of the East' (*Testament*: 262). Hülegü is, to a certain extent, presented as an eschatological last emperor, but this time one sent by God to save the Christian

[48] Description of this text in Graf 1944, 1: 292. It has been published in Arabic alphabet by Ziadé 1918-1919: 261-73, 433-44.
[49] On the various 'Testaments of Our Lord Jesus Christ' during the first four centuries of Islam, see Debié 2005: 128-39.
[50] Banū Ismā'īl referring to the Muslims.
[51] On the origin of this name, see *infra*.
[52] On the term *laqab*, see Bosworth 1986: 622-35.

community from the ignominies that the sons of Ismā'īl are inflicting on it. Hülegü spills the blood of the Muslims, seizes Baghdad, thereby destroying the Abbasid caliphate, and takes Aleppo; his great emir Kitbugha, whose name is also cited, reaches Damascus; he pushes on as far as the Holy Land, then stops at a spring ('Ayn-mā)[53]. One notes that the author of the *Testament*, who presents the Mongols as agents of divine providence come to deliver the Christian communities from the Islamic yoke, makes no mention of Baybars' defeat of the Mongols at 'Ayn Jālūt.[54]

This apocalyptic text recalls Baybars' regicide: 'Quṭuz, who defeated Kitbugha, was killed by the emirs, his relatives' (*Testament*: 263). The author of the *Testament* constructs the figure of Baybars as the inverse of Hülegü. He writes that 'This Turk, Bībars, who will seize power, will be bad [for the Christians]. He will take your own city, Antioch, Peter, [...], he will reduce the churches to ruin and massacre the priests and monks' (*Testament*: 263). The description of events in *Testament of Our Lord Jesus Christ* is entirely at one with the accounts of Baybars' actions given by the Islamic sources; this apocalyptic text may, in fact, be considered, to some extent, a historical account. The author describes events from a Christian perspective and lays the emphasis, as did Ibn al-Nafīs, on the harshness of Baybars' reign for the Christian and Muslim populations. It must therefore be read in contrast to the Mamluk sultan's royal historiography, to the eschatological dimension given his reign by the title 'Alexander of the age' in his monumental epigraphy, and to his role as last emperor in Ibn al-Nafīs' treatise. While he refrains from placing too much emphasis on Hülegü's providential role, the author of the *Testament*, a Syriac Christian, does not stress the violence of the Mongol conquests. He conveys the positive view that the Christians took of the infidel Mongol rule of Muslim lands. The Ilkhans, who had Nestorian wives, were indeed favourable to the Eastern Christians, at least until Ghazan Khan's conversion to Islam in 1295, as is attested by the Persian sources.[55]

Conclusion

Comparison of this group of texts yields a wealth of information on the process of legitimation deployed in Baybars' favour, and also the Muslims and Christian perceptions of the Mongol invasions in the innermost heart of the Islamic empire. From the time he seized power, Baybars sought to make up for his lack of lineage by incorporating himself into a symbolic line of fighters for the faith who had been aided by God; this is attested by the 'Testament of Victory (*Mashhad al-naṣr*)' that he had erected at 'Ayn Jālūt to commemorate his resounding victory over the Mongol troops. He also sought to use the same occasion to erase the memory of sultan Quṭuz's murder by claiming the victory as his own on the monument. The regicide of his former master's natural heir was another memory that Baybars sought to purge, here claiming Ayyubid legitimacy by keeping the name that linked him to the Ayyubid sultan.

The propagandists of the sultan, seeking Islamic legitimacy, emphasized his image as the ideal Muslim sovereign. He is presented in the narrative sources and in his monumental epigraphy as a fighter for the faith (*al-ghāzī*), aided by God in his military victories (*al-mu'ayyad*), a just (*al-'ādil*) and pious sovereign. This image conforms to that of the ideal sovereign of the Mirror for the Princes. Ibn al-

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[53] 'Ayn-mā for 'Ayn Jālūt.

[54] Hülegü and his Nestorian Christian wife, Doquz Khatun, were depicted with the characteristics of Constantine and Helen in the traditional description of the feast of the Cross in a Jacobite lectionary dated to 1260 in the Vatican library: see Leroy 1964: 280-302. On the dating of this manuscript, see Fiey 1975: 23, 59-64. Another Syriac manuscript, held in the British Library in London, also depicts Constantine and Helen with Mongol features (described in Leroy 1964: 302-13). However, some portrayals of Constantine and Helen with Turkic features are found before the arrival of the Mongols in Persia.

[55] Ghazan's pro-Islamic policy must be put in context. His amir Nōrūz, the architect of his conversion to Islam, was responsible for it: see Aubin 1995: 62. It is also worth recalling that Ghazan fought his military campaigns in Syria-Palestine with Armenian and Georgian Christians in his armies. See Stewart 2001: 136-53; Amitai 2002: 239-44; Aigle 2006: 10-14; *idem* 2007: 89-120.

Nafīs, whose concern is to justify the harshness of Baybars' rule towards the Muslim populations of Syria-Palestine, makes the sultan the eschatological last emperor. He has saved the Muslim community by cleansing it of its sins, but also by delivering it from the Mongol danger in the region. In the *Testament of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, for the Christians the roles here were reversed in favour of Hülegü. After the fall of Baghdad, the latter soon came to be seen as the 'New Constantine' who was thus counterposed to the figure of Baybars as the eschatological 'New Alexander'.

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